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**STATE ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICIALS ANNOUNCE PARTIAL
RE-OPENING OF BUZZARD'S BAY SHELLFISH BEDS**

50% of beds representing up to \$2m in annual catch to re-open

Officials from the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries announced today that roughly half of the shellfish beds closed on April 28, 2003 due to the Bouchard Transportation oil spill will re-open as of sunrise tomorrow (5/22/03).

Upon verifying the results of extensive sample testing, the Division of Marine Fisheries has determined that certain areas of coastline in Bourne, Dartmouth, Fairhaven, Falmouth, Gosnold, Marion, Mattapoisett, New Bedford, Wareham and Westport should be re-opened to shell fishing. Local shellfish authorities should be contacted for information regarding specific fishing areas in these towns.

Areas set for re-opening tomorrow comprise approximately 90,000 acres, roughly half of the bay's 180,000-acre area. The April 28, 2003 closure of the bay affected an estimated 50 miles of shoreline and severely impacted commercial shell fishing and wildlife.

"I am pleased that we are able to re-open such a significant portion of Buzzard's Bay after this serious ecological insult. We will continue to monitor the environmental impacts of this spill and will remain mindful of the economic effects as well," said Environmental Affairs Secretary Ellen Roy Herzfelder.

Coordinated efforts between NOAA Fisheries, the United States Coast Guard, US Fish and Wildlife and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have sought to evaluate the oil impacts in cooperation with Bouchard and its representatives. Ninety miles of shoreline have been assessed of which an estimated 50 miles have been oiled to varying degrees. The areas due to re-open tomorrow were not oiled as a result of the April 27, 2003 spill and neither shellfish nor shellfish habitat in these areas was affected.

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Constant surveillance of the shoreline of Buzzards Bay by highly trained Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Teams enabled daily map construction of the bay. An analysis of shellfish tissue taken from these mapped areas was undertaken in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Department of Environmental Protection. The analysis determined that shellfish from these areas were not affected by the spill.

“Efforts by local officials and volunteers have been instrumental in this opening and will be vital to the continuation of the clean up. Sampling of shellfish by the Division of Marine Fisheries from the remaining closed areas is ongoing and will determine the extent of public health and environmental impacts,” said Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement Commissioner David Peters.

Local shellfish authorities should be contacted for information regarding specific fishing areas.

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